

Linda Clair
Five-day Meditation Retreat
Kallara Conference Centre, Australia – June 2019
Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 2d – Sunday afternoon discussion session

Question: You said to P. earlier that you could use the breath to suppress. If I bring my attention to the breathing – when I've found I'm thinking I bring my attention back to the breathing – if I carry on that attention in the breathing does it suppress thoughts?

Linda: Not necessarily, it depends on your intention. It's why I said don't focus, because if you do focus you are suppressing lots of things, thoughts, thinking. But if you see the thought and then make that effort to come back to your body, that's very different to just focusing and holding on to something. So if you're holding on to it there's a degree of fear there, because you're scared something is going to come in and disturb you, rather than being able to see that movement, to see the thought, and then make that effort to come back to where you are. So focusing is suppression, can be suppression.

Question: I think I've probably been doing that and using the breath to stay away from the thinking rather than seeing the thinking and just coming back to the breath.

Linda: Yeah, it's a tricky thing and it's quite subtle and you will do it sometimes and I'm not saying that's wrong. Because sometimes it is good – you know, I say, "Take a few deep breaths and really assert yourself," and that's what you need to do with this. It's like you're *asserting* yourself. You have to be strong about it. So, it will come and go, don't worry about that too much.

Question: I definitely found this afternoon I was doing that, and I just wanted to be clear because it's the beginning of the retreat rather than the end. One of the things that I have is earworms with music.

Linda: Earworms? What's earworms?

Question: It's when a piece of music plays constantly in your head and there's no respite and there's no dealing with it. And quite often if I get up in the night I've got music playing in my head, so I focus on the breathing to stop it. But as soon as I'm not focusing in the breathing it's back, and today I thought I must ask this.

Linda: Yeah, there is a subtle difference but if it's really driving you crazy like that I'd say use the counting. That will probably be a more effective way of breaking it. Because sometimes you do have to break it using, not force, but definite firmness. You do have to be a bit more firm, bordering on forceful, to do it.

Question: I think it's the effect of the cold – I'm still getting over it – I'm sort of slogging along. Feels a bit like that. Lots of thinking.

Linda: Don't worry about that. Just being here is enough when you're a bit sick like that, just keep slogging. When you're a bit sick it's enough to just survive a retreat, and it does more than you realise. So don't feel that you're not putting as much into it as you'd like to. Just keep going, stay stable.

Question: I didn't come to the first sit after lunch. I had a sleep and just came back for the walking.

Linda: Well do that, and anyone who's not feeling too well, do that. It's better to have a sleep rather than push yourself and get sicker.

Linda: Everyone is looking down in case I ask them something. It's pretty funny.

Question: For this retreat when I arrived I was feeling pretty good and the first two sits were great. And I've been getting this thing recently where it feels like I can feel the body and the breath, but at the same time I can feel this current of pure awareness as well. And sometimes it's just there spontaneously, but other times I've noticed I can just gently put my attention on the current of pure awareness. It's not like a thought, it's hard to describe, but it just feels like this flow of awareness without any content. And then sometimes I just go off into sleep or a really deep thought and drift away. But what I'm wondering, I feel like I can do that while I'm focusing on the breath as well, but do you think it's a good idea to actively bring that into my awareness? Or whether that's something I should leave to happen spontaneously and just be coming to the breath and the body?

Linda: Well, try not to manipulate anything or create some sort of state, or even encourage some sort of state. I'd say let it happen spontaneously and enjoy it while it's happening, because you deserve it, but try not to hang on to it. Be in it, as you said, in a soft way, but be very aware – don't focus on it. The same as the breath – don't focus on the breath. Don't focus on that state, and just let it happen spontaneously. And it will happen out of the blue, it will just happen.

Question: Yeah, because it feels like without actually focusing on it I can just bring it to my awareness in the same way as my breath and my body. But I guess in a subtle way that is manipulating it, because then it will be there more strongly while I'm sitting.

Linda: Yes, it's a very tricky balance. Because you can quite quickly become a little bit deluded. It's so attractive to hang on to a state like that. You put in so much work and then you start to feel that and it's like, "Oh, I just want this. I never want it to go away." It can be very subtle that feeling but it can be there. And then it can turn into a sort of an avoidance, because you don't want the thinking to come back, you don't want the pain or the suffering to come back. But, at the same time, you need to enjoy it and not push that away either.

It's all these things happening that you need to be aware of. And it's another reason not to focus on any one thing, because you need to be seeing everything at the same time, because everything is happening at the same time. Nothing is happening in the past or the future, it's all happening now, and you need to stay as alert as possible. So even when you're feeling that, that incredible energy and awareness, you need to be alert, you need to keep your eyes open and be aware of anything else. So don't *look* for anything specific, just let it happen and accept it. But you have to accept it with a lot of equilibrium and almost neutrality, like you don't care whether you feel it or not. It's the same with bliss – the ultimate bliss is when you don't care whether you feel it or not. You really don't care. It's not your aim to feel that particular thing. And I think that's probably – well, it's very

tempting to aim to feel that, to have a break from all the other stuff happening. So don't push it away, enjoy it, but it is going to end. It's still an experience. So it's very tricky, you have to be careful with that and alert.

Question: It was interesting because last night I got a message on my phone which then really stirred me up emotionally in a big way. So all the sits today have been crazy with constant drifting off into thoughts and churning around all sorts of topics.

Linda: Yes, but in a way that's good. Anything that stirs you up you can use. Really use it. Like you see, "Okay, this has stirred me up." And rather than letting it take control of you, take a stand, "Okay, this has stirred me up. Sure, I feel upset about it but I'm going to work with this." So use it, really work with it whatever it is. And it doesn't really matter what it is, just use anything.

Question: Yeah, I was coming to that a little bit. For a while I was feeling frustrated because it felt like what looked like it was going to be this blissful retreat with some beautiful experiences suddenly just got snapped by a single text message into this horrible churning thought world.

Linda: Yep, and that really brings you down to earth.

Question: Yeah, but I realised this is really good ammunition to work with, you know, I've got really something to sink my teeth into now that wasn't there to that degree before.

Linda: And eventually that's how you see things. It's not like nothing ever affects you again – I can speak for me – there are slight reactions to things. But you see it as something that you can use to go more deeply into this, to sink your teeth into, "Ah, there's a bit of residual stuff – how interesting!"

Question: A lot of residual stuff. (Laughter.)

Linda: Not as much as you think. But it's very, very difficult to accept certain situations.

Question: And it was interesting: for the first time I was feeling physical discomfort and emotional discomfort simultaneously. And at one point had that sort of experience you were talking about before where, with the physical pain, the suffering component fades away and it just becomes raw sensation. It was really interesting to have that with emotional pain at the same time as well, and sort of feel the emotional pain *as* the sensation.

Linda: And it's much preferable to feel it as the sensation than that horrible emotional pain.

Question: But it was amazing to feel both the physical and the emotional pain at the same time, sort of transitioning slightly into this other. But that was only for a little while, then it all came back.

Linda: How do you feel now?

Question: Still a little bit all over the place, but okay.

Question: Sometimes you say, "It's all one," and I don't know what that would – I can only imagine, but I can't even really imagine – what that would be. Was there a point in your practice where you

had a sense of that, or a taste of it even? Or was it only after enlightenment that that all falls into place, that that becomes a known thing?

Linda: Yeah, I didn't have any idea before really. The closest I could get was when I was around my teachers at times and I got this slight – they'd say something and I'd feel something, or I'd be sitting with them – but really, no. I didn't have any idea what was going on. And it wasn't till afterwards that I realised what everyone was talking about, what all the teachers were talking about, and what my teachers were talking about. So you can have very slight senses of things, certain things. But even if it feels like a very deep realisation, it's just the tip of the iceberg. And that's how huge this whole thing is – it's like this huge thing that we can't see because the mind is still in the way.

It's because we're always looking for the presence of something. And it's impossible to describe or to feel the absence of something, which is really what we're looking for, a deeper absence, not a deeper presence. But we're obsessed with getting more, or seeing something, or feeling something in particular. But when everything is just one there's an absence. That's the best way to describe it – an absence. And it's the most beautiful thing this absence. The word absence takes on a completely different meaning. Whereas most people see absence as something a bit negative, something lacking, but an absence of fear, an absence of judgment, that's what love is – just an absence.

I always remember Barry Long talking about it at one point. I can remember him saying it. He said, "It's an ab-sence." He said it in a particular way, and this was a long time ago, and something about it – I had no idea what he was talking about – but it really affected me.

Question: Yeah, sometimes things you say that I don't understand stick with me. And I wait for the moment when I'll go, "Oh, that's what she meant."

Linda: Yeah, it suddenly comes up.

So I got this really lovely email today from this woman who was at the retreat in Oxford, apologizing for stuff that she said to me, and admitting she totally misunderstood what I was saying. She was saying I was cold-hearted and all this. It was quite amazing what she said. At the time it didn't affect me because I knew where it was coming from with her, but other people got quite upset about what she said. Anyway she wrote this email just apologizing, saying she just totally misunderstood what absence meant. And to her it meant this coldness, and, "How can you be feeling and compassionate when there's this absence?" I was talking about an absence of empathy, you know, I can't empathize with people anymore, and that really horrified her. And it probably horrifies a lot of people. "Who am I going to be without my emotions?" Because that's what empathy is really, the ability to feel other people's emotions. But what good is that going to do anyone?

It is impossible to describe and it can sound a bit cold. And that's what people are scared of – they're going to become this really cold human being. But it's the opposite, it's the total opposite. And the reason it didn't affect me when she said that was because I know I'm not, it's the opposite. She was just misunderstanding. You just become so warm and so loving because you're not obsessed with yourself anymore. But there's this deep fear that you're going to become this robot without your emotions, and without empathy.

So this absence is just impossible to describe, you can't describe absence. And you don't know how it is until the fear has gone, the judgments have gone. And you can say that you don't want this stuff, "I don't want to feel fear or judgments." But the deepest fear is not to feel that fear. "Who am I going to be without my fear?"

So this attachment to the known is very, very strong, and it takes time to break it down, and you *need* to do it gradually. So when you say the things that really go in are things that you don't understand, it's because they're going in to you in a bodily way, not with your mind filtering it. But I thought I had a sense of what was going to happen and how it was going to be, but really I had no idea. It's a total shock, a total surprise.

Question: Can you meet that absence in death as well? Is it the same sort of thing or not?

Linda: In death? Well, I don't know because I haven't died yet. But this whole thing is a kind of death. And I know you went through that near death experience. How did that feel?

Question: Listening to you now, it was an absence. There was sort of nothing, but there was no fear, there was just nothing, and it was okay.

Linda: Yeah, and it is. So there's not fear. The absence means really there is no fear. So it would be different to that but there would be similarities. And a lot of this is to do with accepting your mortality and becoming free from that fear of death of the body, the end of you. So this is about the end of you before your body dies, which is a bit different.

Linda: Because I feel what happens when you die is that you do go through that period of nothing, the absence. It's probably a huge relief when you actually die. But if you haven't finished the work you need to do – and that's probably why you came back, because there's more you can do – and this has given you the chance to do that.

Question: That's the scary thought, that there's more to do, yes.

Linda: I feel once you die you do have that period of feeling that, and probably even ecstasy for a while, and, "Oh wow, this is it." But then the unenlightened cells group together and need to become enlightened, so parts of you do come back into other bodies to become enlightened. So I'd say initially there is that feeling, an incredible feeling, but then you realise there's more. This is just what I feel, but of course I haven't died so I don't know. But there's nothing to be scared of. There's this deep fear of this state but there's nothing to be scared of.

Question: That was the overwhelming thing that I found – no fear.

Linda: Yeah, so feeling that while you're still in the body and not actually dying is quite an amazing thing. And then you need to learn to live in the body in that state. And the reasons for being in your body change completely. Like for me, before there were a whole lot of reasons to be alive, to be in my body – I was looking for something, really I was looking for union. But I didn't know that. But once you realise why you're here in this body there's not this urgent need to stay in your body. There's not this fear of losing your body. So you just lose the attachment to your body. It's not like you're not grounded – you become even more and more grounded in your body. And it's still about

the body but in a totally different way. And that fear that was in the body almost completely goes. There might be still a little bit, but it's just a shadow really, slight residual stuff.

So this is your chance, that's why you're here.